

CANCER IN SOUTHWEST VIRGINIA

****Southwest Virginia represents the Cumberland Plateau, Lenowisco, and Mount Rogers health districts, which include the following counties: Bland, Bristol, Buchanan, Carroll, Dickenson, Grayson, Lee, Russell, Scott, Smyth, Tazewell, and Wise counties, and the cities of Norton and Galax.**

Data from the Virginia Cancer Registry show that approximately 30,098 tumors were diagnosed in residents of the Cumberland Plateau, Lenowisco, and Mount Rogers health districts from 1999 to 2003. By comparison a total of 147,208 tumors were diagnosed in Virginia residents for the same period resulting in a state cancer rate of 428.2 per 100,000.

Risk Factors

Risk factors for cancer include tobacco use, diet, lack of physical activity, obesity, environmental carcinogens, UV rays from the sun and a family history of cancer.

In southwest Virginia's three health districts the percent of women over age 40 who had a mammogram in the two years preceding 2003-2004 is lower than the statewide average (75.7 percent) during the same period.

What VDH is Doing

VDH's Cancer Control Project formed a partnership with the Mountain Empire Older Citizens, Inc. in Big Stone Gap to conduct a one-day educational seminar or cancer survivorship. Approximately 134 individuals attended the seminar, "Coping with Cancer, Finding Health and Well-Being." VDH also provided a mini-grant to the seniors group to develop a culturally sensitive activity relating to surviving cancer. As a result the group developed story-telling skits on surviving cancer. Story telling is a traditional form of communication in Appalachia.

Also, VDH's Every Woman's Life program screened approximately 1,200 women in the three health districts for breast and cervical cancer in 2004-2005. The screenings uncovered 20 women who had breast cancer. The program provides free breast and cervical cancer screening and follow-up tests to women age 40-64 who have low-income and limited or no health insurance. Women who are diagnosed with cancer by the Every Woman's Life program are eligible to receive treatment through the Medicaid Program.